NOAA’s role in this Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) began on April 20, 2010, in the hours immediately following the report of an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon mobile drilling unit. Personnel began monitoring the oil’s trajectory and collecting baseline environmental data.

By mid-May, NOAA and its partners had formed more than a dozen technical working groups devoted to assessing damages to various types of natural resources, from our coastlines to the deep seas, and from microscopic plankton to porpoises.

Three federal agencies (Commerce, Interior, Defense) and five affected states (Alabama, Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, Texas) are co-trustees in the NRDA.


In most large oil spill cases, the total of samples collected from the field number in the hundreds. As of October 21, NRDA teams have collected 25,803 environmental samples for analysis. Our laboratories have conducted 35,478 NRDA analyses on these samples.

6,835 analyses have been validated and made available to the public.

The 25,803 total samples include those collected by more than 70 offshore, research cruises NOAA has either conducted or currently has under way, including:

- 10,236 water samples
- 3,060 sediment samples
- 3,286 tissue samples
- 1,840 tarball samples.

About 2,000 linear miles of shoreline have been surveyed by the NRDA teams; teams have documented oil on about 1,000 miles of shoreline, including salt marshes, sandy beaches, mudflats, and mangroves.

Response teams have documented 2,263 visibly oiled dead birds; 2,079 visibly oiled live birds; 18 visibly oiled dead sea turtles; and 456 visibly oiled live sea turtles.